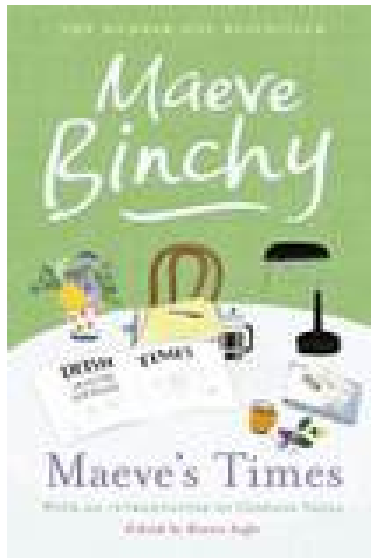


Featured Title

Maeve's Times : Selected Irish Times Writings / Maeve Binchy ; edited by Roisin Ingle

Non Fiction 2013



'As someone who fell off a chair not long ago trying to hear what they were saying at the next table in a restaurant, I suppose I am obsessively interested in what some might consider the trivia of other people's lives.' Maeve Binchy is well-known for her bestselling novels, the most recent of which was *A WEEK IN WINTER*. But for many years Maeve was a journalist, writing for *The Irish Times*. From 'The Student Train' to 'Plane Bores', 'Bathroom Joggers' to 'When Beckett met Binchy', these articles have all the warmth, wit and humanity of her fiction. Arranged in decades, from the 1960s to the 2000s, and including Maeve's first and last ever piece of writing for *The Irish Times*, the columns also give a fascinating insight into the author herself. With an introduction written by her husband, the writer Gordon Snell, this collection of timeless writing reminds us of why the leading Irish writer was so universally loved.

Book Review

Maeve's Times: Irish Times Selected Writings by Maeve Binchy

Reviewed by Anna Carey

<https://www.irishtimes.com/>

Maeve's Times is funny and clever and kind, which are excellent qualities in both books and people. I've spent a lot of time over the past few days trying to think of the best way to open this review, and then I remembered what Maeve Binchy herself wrote in 1983, in a piece entitled "Develop Your Own Style", which is one of more than 90 pieces collected in this new book: "If you are having difficulty beginning something . . . an article, a short story, a novel or a play . . . ask yourself, 'What am I trying to say?' Then say it aloud and nine times out of 10 you'll have your first sentence." So that's what I did.

In "Develop Your Own Style", Binchy writes of the importance of writing in a natural, unaffected way. But natural should never be confused with unsophisticated or unskilled, and what this wonderful collection of her work for this paper from 1964 to 2011 makes abundantly clear, is that she was a superb journalist.

She began writing for *The Irish Times* when she was still working as a teacher, and became the paper's women's editor in 1968. In 1973 she moved to London, where she continued to write features and columns.

In her acknowledgements, the collection's editor, *Irish Times* journalist Róisín Ingle, rightly points out that from her earliest pieces, Binchy's writing voice seemed fully evolved. Not only did she have the ability to perfectly evoke a scene, a personality or even a national mood in just a few hundred words, but she could write pieces so perfectly crafted that they filled me with a sort of envious delight.

Opening lines

Almost every piece in the book begins with the sort of opening line that many journalists lie awake at night trying to create. Binchy never goes for a lazy cliché or a trite phrase, and she always grabs the reader. Take this opener, from 1976: "I was nearly the co-author of a best-selling pornographic book, and sometimes when I stand in the rain waiting for a non-existent bus and unable to afford the taxis that come by empty and warm and comfortable, I think that it was very feeble of me not to have gone ahead with the project."

Who wouldn't want to read more?

Her friendliness towards and interest in total strangers radiates from almost every page, and provides her with some of the book's most entertaining stories. There's her encounter with a man who has accidentally settled in to wait for a friend in a corner of a hotel's ladies' cloakroom (he thought it was a quiet alcove that just happened to have a mirror in it). And I particularly loved her bus-stop conversation with a woman who didn't share her happiness at the new law legalising the sale of contraceptives.

Unsurprisingly, this is a very funny book; Binchy could make pretty much anything hilarious, from having one's photograph taken to going to hospital. But it's not all fun. Binchy's writing has often been viewed, mostly by people with only the most cursory acquaintance with her novels, as cosy. But she never shied away from dark subjects in her fiction, and she didn't do so in her journalism either. She wrote about abortion and poverty and loneliness and cruelty and our inability to deal honestly with death.

She did so without sentiment and with great compassion. Her report on the capsizing of the ferry *Herald of Free Enterprise* at Zeebrugge in 1987, in which she goes to the ferry terminal in Dover where the families of those aboard wait for news of their relatives, is a masterclass in how to capture the terrible effect of a tragedy on those left behind without poking a microphone in their faces or intruding on their grief.

She also highlighted serious problems by pointing out those who are trying to change things for the better. In "A Tipperary Robin Hood", she shows the grim effects of Margaret Thatcher's policies on older people by looking at a Tipperary-born social worker in London who does her impressive and imaginative best to make her aging clients' lives easier. It's a brilliant approach that doesn't ignore the realities of lonely, impoverished old age but reminds the reader that there's still hope for change.

While many of the pieces are personal tales, the book is a reminder of how good a reporter she was. As well as the Zeebrugge disaster, there are her accounts of civilian suffering in wartorn Cyprus and the protests at Greenham Common, her encounters with Charlie Haughey and Samuel Beckett, and her witty accounts of every royal wedding from Princess Anne's to Kate and William's. These reports are short but so evocative and insightful.

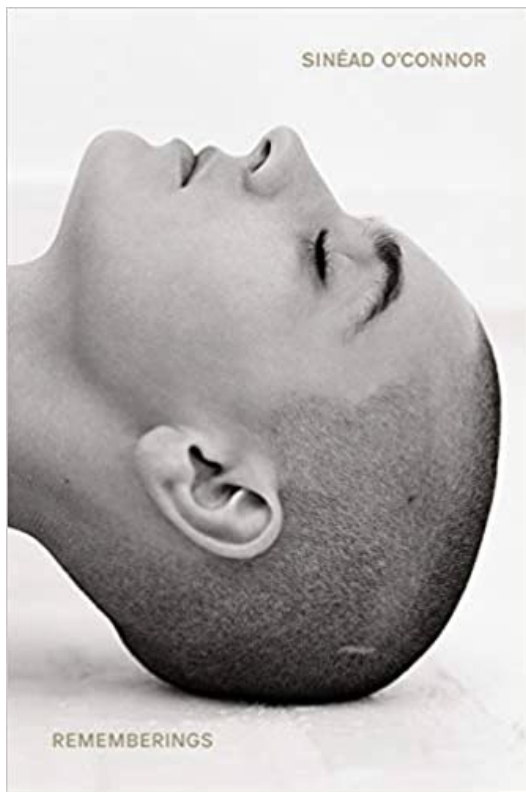
Of course, some pieces in the book have stood the test of time better than others. A series of 1970s pieces called *Women Are Fools*, which tell the stories of individual women who weren't satisfied with their lot and suffered as a result, may have aimed to highlight the limitations placed on Irish women's lives, but some of them now read like rather trite morality tales. But even those stories are gripping narratives, and their slight datedness merely highlights how well everything else stands up.

Anyone who has read Binchy's novels will be familiar with her subtle but strong feminism, and it's evident throughout these pieces. Sometimes it's explicit, as in the hilarious story of her attempt to pay for a male friend's lunch ("The waiter took my cheque and cheque card like a butler in a film might pick up a tousled gypsy child to remove it from his lordship's eyes"), or her evaluation of Margaret Thatcher ("She has almost single-handedly banished the notion that it is somehow unusual or special for a woman to be able to do anything. For that, if nothing else, women in the future may thank her").

But it's always implicit in the way she writes about women's lives, including her own. As Irish women's lives were gradually transformed over the last few decades of the 20th century, Binchy constantly provided the voice of quietly radical common sense. This book is a reminder of how important that voice was. She doesn't say anything in "Develop Your Own Style" about how to end a review, but I'll trust that her advice to simply write what you want to say still holds. So this is how I'll end it: thank you, Maeve. Thank you very much.

Featured Title

Rememberings / Sinéad O'Connor Non Fiction 2022



The landmark memoir of a global music icon. Sinéad O'Connor's voice and trademark shaved head made her famous by the age of twenty-one. Her recording of Prince's 'Nothing Compares 2 U' made her a global icon. She outraged millions when she tore up a photograph of Pope John Paul II on American television. O'Connor was unapologetic and impossible to ignore, calling out hypocrisy wherever she saw it. She has remained that way for three decades. Now, in *Rememberings*, O'Connor tells her story - the heartache of growing up in a family falling apart; her early forays into the Dublin music scene; her adventures and misadventures in the world of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll; the fulfilment of being a mother; her ongoing spiritual quest - and through it all, her abiding passion for music. *Rememberings* is intimate, replete with candid anecdotes and full of hard-won insights. It is a unique and remarkable chronicle by a unique and remarkable artist.

Book Review

For the full review see:

<https://inverarity.livejournal.com/>

Nothing compares to you. Rest In Peace, Sinéad Marie Bernadette, aka Shuhada' Sadaqat.

From the acclaimed, controversial singer-songwriter Sinéad O'Connor comes a revelatory memoir of her fraught childhood, musical triumphs, fearless activism, and of the enduring power of song.

Blessed with a singular voice and a fiery temperament, Sinéad O'Connor rose to massive fame in the late 1980s and 1990s with a string of gold records. By the time she was 20, she was world famous - living a rock-star life out loud. From her trademark shaved head to her 1992 appearance on *Saturday Night Live* when she tore up Pope John Paul II's photograph, Sinéad has fascinated and outraged millions.

In *Rememberings*, O'Connor recounts her painful tale of growing up in Dublin in a dysfunctional, abusive household. Inspired by a brother's Bob Dylan records, she escaped into music. She relates her early forays with local Irish bands; we see Sinéad completing her first album while eight months pregnant, hanging with Rastas in the East Village, and soaring to unimaginable popularity with her cover of Prince's "Nothing Compares 2U".

Intimate, replete with candid anecdotes and told in a singular form true to her unconventional career, Sinéad's memoir is a remarkable chronicle of an enduring and influential artist.

I was never a big fan of Sinéad O'Connor during the height of her popularity, even though I was an 80s kid and she was just a couple of years older than me. I was vaguely aware of her various shenanigans (I think I actually watched that infamous live SNL episode in 1992), but until she passed away a few weeks ago, she was just another pop star whose music videos I'd been watching since MTV actually showed music videos.

Upon her death, I relistened to a few of her albums and.... wow. She really did have a voice.

Her most famous song, of course, the one that launched her into stardom, was her cover of Prince's *Nothing Compares 2 U*. Her face and her voice are ethereal.

And that brought me to her memoir, *Rememberings*, published in 2021. I rarely read memoirs, especially by pop stars, but despite never being one of her big fans, something about Sinéad O'Connor's life and passing touched me.

I listened to the audiobook, which was narrated by Sinéad herself. She is raw, funny, contradictory, vulnerable, vulgar, a little bit crazy, and I am pretty certain she actually wrote this book herself, she didn't have a ghostwriter do it.

Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood. (Angela's Ashes / Frank McCourt 1996)

Sinéad Marie Bernadette O'Connor was born in 1966 in Dublin, and her childhood was certainly worthy of a Frank McCourt novel. She seemed to have a good relationship with her father, but her mother was violent, abusive, and almost certainly suffering from severe mental illness. This is one of many tragic threads running through *Rememberings*; she talks about truly horrific abuse she experienced at her mother's hands, the anger and resentment she felt, the trauma she lived with for the rest of her life, and yet clearly it is her mother whose love and affection she never stopped longing for. Both in the foreword and the afterword, Sinéad addresses her parents directly, telling them they did their best and absolving them of responsibility for her own issues....

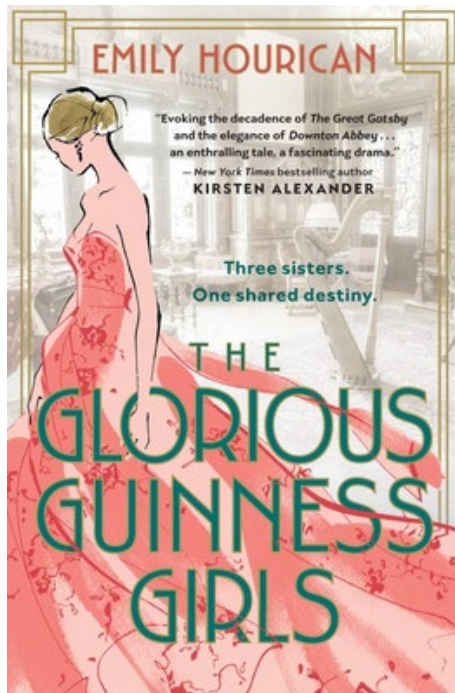
At age 15, having run away from her mother and being too much of a truant for her father, she got sent to one of Ireland's Magdalene laundries. It's not entirely clear from her memoir what the arrangement was, but apparently her father had some influence over her status, and she was allowed to take outside classes, and met a friendly nun who bought her a guitar upon learning of her affinity for music. But she also describes being sent to one of the "secret" wings, after an episode of misbehavior, where she had to spend the night with elderly women suffering from dementia who'd spent their entire lives in the asylum and would never leave. It was like hell, as she describes it, and yet she speaks kindly of the nun who sent her there, saying that she was sending Sinéad a message, showing her what her future would be like if she didn't straighten up. This contradiction appears repeatedly throughout the book; Sinéad loves and hates authority figures, religion, and people who take advantage of and abuse her.

It was evident from an early age that she had a gift for music. She talks of singing at every opportunity. In the late 80s she began hanging around the Irish music scene, began singing with a few bands, and eventually got signed up to a record label.

Sinéad O'Connor loved music. She hated the music industry. In this book, she rails against the Church, against abusers, against racism and sexism, against the oppression of Ireland, but most of all, about the music industry and how they tried to screw her over repeatedly.

Featured Title

The Glorious Guinness Girls : a novel / Emily Hourican Fiction 2020



Granddaughters of the first Earl of Iveagh, the three daughters of Ernest Guinness are glamorous society girls, the toast of Dublin and London. Darlings of the press, with not a care in the world.

But what beautiful ruins lie behind the glass of their privileged worlds?

Inspired by fascinating real events and a remarkable true story, from the turmoil of Ireland's War of Independence to the brittle glamour of 1920s London, this dramatic, richly textured reading group novel takes us into the heart of a beautiful but often painful hidden world.

<https://hforhistory.co.uk/>

Set amid the turmoil of the Irish Civil War and the brittle glamour of 1920s London, *The Glorious Guinness Girls* is inspired by one of the most fascinating family dynasties in the world – an unforgettable novel of reckless youth, family loyalty and destiny.

Here, author Emily Hourican talks about her inspiration for writing the novel.

....When I came to university in Dublin, I met people who had gone to parties at a house called *Luggala*, about an hour's drive from Dublin, set in a beautiful valley surrounded by mountains and, laid out in front of it like a carpet, a lake of water coloured black by peat so that it looked for all the world like a spilled pint of Guinness.

Those parties – famous for the informal generosity of their hospitality – were thrown by Oonagh Guinness. They were full of artists, writers, poets and playwrights. They rambled on across nights and days, with people, so I was told, falling asleep on sofas and mattresses, in the middle of heated cultural discussions, only for them to wake, have a Champagne cocktail, and pick up exactly where they had left off.

Others I met had been to parties given by Oonagh's older sister Aileen in a castle called *Luttrellstown* that sits in lush green acres on the north of Dublin. These were more horsey, it seemed – timed to coincide with race meetings and the Dublin Horse Show. Aileen's guests were celebrities, aristos and the jet-set (Hollywood actors and international playboys). At *Luttrellstown*, there was always the chance of an apple-pie bed, or a bucket of water balanced on the door-jam of one's bedroom but that, apparently, was nothing compared to the hi-jinks favoured by the middle sister, Maureen, who had a fake nose in the shape of a penis, and liked to dress as a kind of slovenly maid and sidle up to male guests to her house and ask if they wanted 'to go, sir' while leering in the direction of the lavatory.

I liked the sound of these Guinnesses. I have sisters – two as it happens (and some brothers), and I have always been fascinated by the bond – close, competitive, loyal, loving, infuriated – that exists between sisters. In later years, after I became a journalist, I wrote about the Guinness Girls many times. About their privileged background – the daughters of one of the wealthiest men in Ireland and the UK – and also the tragedies that they endured. I loved the historical background to their lives – they grew up in Ireland during the War of Independence and the Civil War, then moved to London when their father, Ernest, decided it was no longer safe for them to stay, despite the fact that as a Guinness, he was one of the best employers in the country. Once they got to London, in 1924, they landed straight into the society of the time – the Bright Young People of post-war England, going to parties with Diana Mitford and the Prince of Wales – partying on through the ‘Devil’s Decade’ of the 1930s when unemployment was at a shocking high and fascism was on the rise even in the UK, into the years of the Second World War and on into the 1950s and 60s, curiously untouched by the realities of the changing world around them. They were insulated by their money, but also by their attitude – a kind of childish devotion to fun and frivolity. They married, then married again (and sometimes again; eight husbands between them), had children, watched children die tragically, and lived to ripe old ages. Aileen, the last to die in 1999, was 95.

In everything I found out about them, these Guinness girls seemed at once real people but also characters in my favourite novels by Evelyn Waugh and Nancy Mitford.

One day, after I had finished my fourth novel, over coffee with my editor, she and I talked about what I might do next. I said I’d been thinking about historical fiction, and she said she’d been thinking about the Guinness Girls. And that was it. I could see an entire story in my head.

In fact I have told the story through a character I created – Fliss, who is sent to live with the Guinnesses when she is 11 and they are almost the same age. She watches them grow up, become women, fall in love, get married and far more. She knows them like no one else does. Telling the story like this allows me perspective and an outsiders view into the lavish world the girls inhabit. Having Fliss as the eyes and ears means the girls are free to be themselves, without having to tell the story. Fliss does that for them.

Authors of historical fiction are always saying how much they loved the research. I’m not sure I ever believed them – it sounded a bit like my history degree – until I began work on this book. Now, I’ve joined their ranks. I loved researching this. Every bit of it. The hard part was stopping researching and starting writing.

This is a work of fiction. There are characters based on real people, and there are invented characters, but all are part of a fictional landscape. Fliss is a completely invented character, as are Hughie and Richard. The girls – Aileen, Maureen and Oonagh – were real people, of course, as were their parents, their husbands, their many cousins and so on. But the characters in this book are my versions of these people. They aren’t the Guinnesses; they are characters based on what I know of them, fleshed out with things I have invented.

I have stuck closely to the details of the girls’ lives, and woven my story around specific historic moments. The challenge was to plot a story that took in these moments and made sense of them – a kind of join-the-dots, with fiction weaving in and out of fixed historical points. By and large, I’ve been faithful to the time and dates of these events – I think it’s much less fun if one ‘cheats’. The result? A novel about real people, using things that did happen, to tell a story I have invented.

Featured Title

The Making of Her / Bernadette Jiwa Fiction 2022



Dublin 1996. Joan Egan lives an enviable life. She and her husband, Martin, and daughter, Carmel, are thriving in Dublin at the dawn of an economic boom.

But everything changes when Joan receives a letter from Emma, the daughter she and Martin gave up for adoption thirty years before, asking for a life-or-death favour.

While Joan grapples with the guilt over giving up her baby long ago, she must confront her present as the cracks in her marriage become impossible to ignore and simmering tension with Carmel boils over. Meanwhile, Carmel and Emma must come to terms with the perceived sins of their mother, to imagine a future for their family before it is too late.

Spanning the nineties and the sixties, with Dublin as its backdrop, *The Making of Her* is the tender and page-turning story of marriage, motherhood, a culture that would not allow a woman to find true happiness, and her journey to finally claim it.

About the Author

Bernadette Jiwa is an Irish Australian author who began her writing apprenticeship as a blogger and non-fiction writer in her mid-forties.

Industry Reviews

'*The Making of Her* sucked me in from the very first page, and didn't let up until I'd turned the last. Heart-warming and heart-breaking, it is an exquisite examination of the secrets that haunt us. I cried several times. A stunning debut.' Sally Hepworth

'Bernadette Jiwa writes with compassion and grace about what it means to be a mother, a daughter and a sister.' Pip Williams

'A beautifully crafted, thought-provoking novel that ultimately celebrates the strength of women. A true pleasure to read.' Ashley Audrain

<https://nicestackofbooks.myshopify.com/>

Book Review

By Jami Denison

<http://www.chicklitcentral.com/>

With the country under turmoil after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, historical novels about women facing crisis pregnancies have more meaning and resonance than ever before. While *The Making of Her*, Irish-Australian author Bernadette Jiwa's debut novel, has some issues, it's a mesmerizing look at how a woman's lack of choice reverberates over her entire life.

In 1960s Dublin, Joan is the eldest daughter of an alcoholic dock worker, a man so weak that he gave up his younger children when his wife died in childbirth. Working in a factory and keeping house, Joan's life has little sunshine until she spots a cute bike messenger. After they meet and flirt, Joan is stunned to learn that Martin is the scion of one of the most successful business owners in the city. Martin's overbearing mother disapproves of the relationship, but the young couple continues to meet in secret until the inevitable happens...

In 1996, Joan and Martin have been unhappily married for 30 years. They still live with his mother, and their adult daughter, Carmel, helps out in the business. When the daughter they gave up for adoption finally contacts Joan, Martin doesn't want her to respond due to fear for their reputation. But Joan has missed this girl every day since she gave her up. What will she do?

While the prose was often unsophisticated, this story drew me right in. It has a lot of classic soap opera beats, and I've always loved a good soap opera. The scenes in 1960s Dublin were especially compelling; *Call The Midwife* from the hardscrabble woman's point-of-view. Jiwa demonstrates how sexism, classism, and religion combine to keep a poor young woman firmly in her station. Even when she manages to escape her old neighborhood, she's still judged for it.

The novel is written in third person, from the points-of-view of Joan and her two daughters. While each of these women comes across as three-dimensional, Martin and his mother are opaque. Martin's love for his younger daughter makes his decision to ignore his older one a mystery that the writer never really solves. And his mother never has a single human moment in the entire book. Still, it's good soap opera and Jiwa delivers the emotional experience the reader wants.

The past, as the saying goes, is prologue, and as the nation reacts to women losing their bodily autonomy, books like *The Making of Her* are an important reminder of what's at stake. Without options, an unplanned pregnancy can derail a woman's entire life, or even end it. And that's exactly what many forced-birth supporters want.